

Articles and Sermons :: Wanting Too Little

Wanting Too Little - posted by roadsign (), on: 2019/1/28 18:01

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In observing church disputes, including schisms between liberal and conservative leanings, I've come to sense a propensity on both sides of the fence. It's this: Wanting too little - too little from God. I call it EXPECTANCY DEFICIT DISORDER - EDD. We're at risk of seeking after something less than what God has for us. But, we will never have God's best if we don't ask for it. And we will never ask for it if we don't expect it: "Ye have not because ye ask not." (James 4:2)

That was the problem for the woman Jesus met at Jacob's well. When Jesus probed into her personal life where he wanted to bring healing, she deflected the conversation to the ongoing religious conflict. Her people, the Samaritans, were embroiled with the Jewish people in an irreconcilable conflict over which mountain was God's choice for worship. Jesus did not take sides, but instead announced a radically different system of worship:

"God is spirit, and his worshippers must worship in spirit and in truth." (John. 4:24 NIV)

Connection with the Father would no longer be confined to a religious location or practice: place or form. That was the old wineskin worship system. Place and form was to be replaced by spirit and truth through the living water - that is, Christ's Spirit operating in the hearts of anyone who wants it.

At first the woman wanted improvements in her circumstances more than in her heart. She wanted living water so she wouldn't have to trudge to the well anymore. But she wasn't asking for enough - not yet. Jesus helped her overcome her EDD and then she was able to drink deeply of the living water. Soon, through her testimony and Jesus's presence, other Samaritans discovered this amazing water. Imagine! This entire event took place outside their traditional place and form of worship!

This was God's best, God's love at work. This was the transforming power of his Spirit. Obviously, this wind can never be contained within the old wineskin - including our own worship communities which are held together by systemized categories of place and form.

Last year I visited Jacob's well in the West Bank. An Orthodox Church now sits over the well. While exploring the site, I noticed bullet holes in the church gate and walls - signs of historical conflict. I say, we too will keep fighting over old wineskin entities as long as we are afflicted with EDD: wanting too little from God. Oh the anguish that results from such faulty pursuits - even at the very location where Jesus offered something better.

Of course, we care about our Christian communities. But like the woman, we'll deflect personal conviction by focusing on conflicts or something else outside of ourselves. Of course we value priorities like scripture, prayer, and evangelism. But we'll try squeezing spiritual entities into old wineskin entities and discover that this doesn't work. We merely get caught in disputes over matters related to place and form - like property, events, rituals, clergy roles, music, and so forth. Because old wineskins are inflexible, the cracks just widen as people embark on restorative missions. Polarities fester and each side views itself to be defending the word of God.

Controversy has a tendency to expose our darker qualities - like self-righteousness, ungraciousness, anger, fear, or controlling tendencies. But then, isn't that exactly what interests God because that's what he wants to change? Facing our darker side is disturbing and convicting, but this is how we acquire a thirst for God's transformative love.

God is a master at using the cracks and defects within our worship wineskins for our benefit. Speaking personally, disappointments have helped me see how I was dependent on the church for my sense of worth and belonging. That's why I'd feel distress when people failed to affirm me. I needed the church to function properly for my sense of security. However, I was expecting fallen sinners to provide what only God could. I had EDD. The Spirit used my difficulties to draw me to him, and like the Samaritan woman, to experience the highest honour possible: affirmation from the King of kings.

The Samaritan woman probably wasn't treated much better afterwards in her religious context. It didn't change; the bitter conflict continued. But now she could enjoy a blessing no one could rob from her, because it welled up from within.

Truly, no worship location, organizational structure, or sacrament can provide God's best for each person. That requires an ongoing miracle of grace. It requires us to pry our fingers off of God's project and stop trying to control it. (Isn't that what keeps the "old wineskin" inflexible?) Inner transformation doesn't happen all at once or according to our program and preferences for others.

Today I've raised a probing question for each of us to ask personally:

Might I be striving for a renewal of the "old wineskin"?

If that's what we're after, then we'll keep diverting our attention to the ruptures, just like the Samaritan woman did at first. And we'll keep expending fruitless energy patching the cracks. We'll end up spiritually bankrupt, with little to give. That's the sad prognosis of EDD.

Why strive for second best when we can have God's best? Why strive after something that won't satisfy, when we can be fulfilled through the "living water"?

Do you want God to give you his best, regardless of personal cost? Then that's what you'll go after, and that's what you'll receive:

Matthew 21: 22 "If you believe, you will receive whatever you ask for in prayer."